



SAN FRANCISCO
OPERA

**SAN FRANCISCO OPERA PRESENTS WEST COAST PREMIERE OF
JAKE HEGGIE AND GENE SCHEER'S *IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE*,
WAR MEMORIAL OPERA HOUSE, NOVEMBER 17–DECEMBER 9**

**Co-Commissioned Opera Is Based on Frank Capra's Classic Film and
Directed by Leonard Foglia**

**Patrick Summers Leads San Francisco Opera Orchestra, Chorus and Cast Headed by
William Burden, Golda Schultz, Andriana Chuchman and Rod Gilfry**



Scenes from *It's a Wonderful Life* and the opera's creators Leonard Foglia, Patrick Summers, Gene Scheer and Jake Heggie.
Photos: Karen Almond/Houston Grand Opera

Tickets available at sfopera.com and (415) 864-3330

SAN FRANCISCO, CA (October 26, 2018) — San Francisco Opera presents the West Coast premiere of *It's a Wonderful Life* by composer **Jake Heggie** and librettist **Gene Scheer** in nine holiday-season performances from November 17 through December 9. The two-act work, a co-commission and co-production between San Francisco Opera, Houston Grand Opera and the Indiana University Jacobs School of Music, is based in part on Frank Capra's 1946 film *It's a Wonderful Life*[™] and *The Greatest Gift*, a story by Philip Van Doren Stern.

The story of *It's a Wonderful Life* is familiar to fans of the eponymous film starring James Stewart, Donna Reed and Lionel Barrymore. On Christmas Eve, George Bailey is contemplating suicide until the angel Clarence helps George see the positive impact of his life on others, thereby restoring his will to live. Heggie and Scheer's full-scale operatic retelling of this touching story of second chances and the importance of each human life premiered at Houston Grand Opera in 2016 with the *Houston Chronicle*

observing, “While the 1946 movie was a work of naturalism, the opera looks and feels like a dream.” The composer, librettist and creative team have revised the work for the West Coast premiere at the War Memorial Opera House.

Heggie said: “*It’s a Wonderful Life* had a beautiful premiere in December 2016, but we were still learning about the piece, of course. We worked on it last year for Indiana University and made quite a few changes, expanding some arias, adding two very beautiful duets and I also wrote a new opening for the opera that starts with a joyful explosion. Our director, Leonard Foglia, and the design team have also revisited the production in some striking and startling ways. It’s all coming together for the San Francisco Opera production which is going to be a knockout and a real treat for the audience!”

The composer continued, “This story is universal and timeless and Frank Capra recognized that when he made the movie. The circumstances are familiar and the message eternal: ‘No one is a failure who has friends.’ It’s about how you measure contentment and happiness in this precarious world.”

The cast features tenor **William Burden** as George Bailey. Burden has earned praise for many portrayals on the War Memorial Opera House stage, including Laca in Janáček’s *Jenůfa*, Tom Rakewell in Stravinsky’s *The Rake’s Progress*, Dan Hill in Christopher Theofanidis’ *Heart of a Soldier* and Peter in Mark Adamo’s *The Gospel of Mary Magdalene* and returns in the role he created with “searing conviction” (*Opera News*) at the world premiere.

In her first San Francisco Opera engagement, South African soprano **Golda Schultz** performs the role of the angel Clara who helps George Bailey while attempting to earn her wings. The fast-rising artist recently made acclaimed debuts at the Metropolitan Opera and Vienna State Opera with the *New York Times* observing she “sang with clear, pure tone and conveyed a sparkling personality, with a ready sense of humor.” Soprano **Kearstin Piper Brown** sings Clara in the December 9 performance.

Baritone **Rod Gilfry** returns to the War Memorial Opera House stage to reprise the banker, Mr. Potter, which he created in 2016. Since 1995, Gilfry has appeared with San Francisco Opera in a diverse array of roles, including Stanley Kowalski in the 1998 world premiere of André Previn’s *A Streetcar Named Desire* and Faust in Ferruccio Busoni’s *Doktor Faust* in 2004.

Recently named a “Woman to Watch” by *Opera News*, Canadian soprano **Andriana Chuchman** makes her first appearance with San Francisco Opera as Mary Hatch, George’s steadfast wife. Tenor **Keith Jameson** and baritone **Joshua Hopkins** make Company debuts as Uncle Billy Bailey and Harry Bailey, respectively, and mezzo-soprano **Catherine Cook** sings the role of Mother Bailey. Current San Francisco Opera Adler Fellows soprano **Sarah Cambidge**, mezzo-soprano **Ashley Dixon**, tenor **Amitai Pati** and bass-baritone **Christian Pursell** portray four Angels First Class. Additionally, the role of A Voice features the pre-recorded voice of actress **Patti LuPone**.

Houston Grand Opera Artistic and Music Director **Patrick Summers** conducts the San Francisco Opera Orchestra. Summers, who has been on the podium for each of Heggie’s operatic world premieres,

made his San Francisco Opera conducting debut in 1990 and has led 33 works with the Company. Chorus Director Ian Robertson prepares the San Francisco Opera Chorus.

The production is directed by **Leonard Foglia** and features the work of set designer **Robert Brill**, costume designer **David C. Woolard**, lighting designer **Brian Nason**, projection designer **Elaine J. McCarthy** and choreographer **Keturah Stickann**. *It's a Wonderful Life* reunites Heggie and Scheer with Maestro Summers, Foglia, Brill, McCarthy and Stickann, the creative team behind the acclaimed production of *Moby-Dick*, which was unveiled at the Dallas Opera in 2010, mounted by San Francisco Opera in 2012 and shown nationwide on PBS Great Performances.

Award-winning composer and San Francisco resident Jake Heggie began his career as a composer at San Francisco Opera with *Dead Man Walking* in 2000. Set to a libretto by Terrence McNally, *Dead Man Walking* has been presented around the world by more than 60 companies. *It's a Wonderful Life* is the fourth of Heggie's operas to be presented by San Francisco Opera and the third of his collaborations with librettist Gene Scheer, which also includes *Three Decembers* (2008) and *Moby-Dick* (2012). The artistic team of Heggie and Scheer were commissioned by Merola Opera Program for *If I Were You*, which is scheduled to receive its world premiere in San Francisco during summer 2019.

Sung in English with English supertitles, the nine performances of *It's a Wonderful Life* are scheduled for November 17 (7:30 p.m.), November 20 (7:30 p.m.), November 24 (2 p.m.), November 25 (2 p.m.), November 29 (7:30 p.m.), December 1 (7:30 p.m.), December 4 (7:30 p.m.), December 7 (7:30 p.m.) and December 9 (2 p.m.).

IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE FAMILY DAY

In conjunction with the Thanksgiving weekend matinee performance of *It's a Wonderful Life* on **Saturday, November 24**, San Francisco Opera hosts a Family Day celebration. Beginning at 11:30 a.m., the "Bedford Falls Makers Market" located in the War Memorial Courtyard (Franklin Street at Fulton Street) will be open to families and the general public. Inspired by the setting of *It's a Wonderful Life*, the town of Bedford Falls, New York, this outdoor marketplace will offer food trucks, handmade crafts from local artists and other family activities. Tickets for children under 18 years of age for the November 24 matinee performance are available at 50% off for families. Recommended for children ages 8 and up.

EXPLORATION WORKSHOPS FOR FAMILIES: ALL ABOUT *IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE*

Saturday, November 24, 11 a.m. and 12:30 p.m.

San Francisco Opera's Education Department hosts two interactive family workshops exploring Jake Heggie and Gene Scheer's *It's a Wonderful Life*. Held in the Diane B. Wilsey Center for Opera on the fourth floor of the Veterans Building, the workshops are for families with children ages 6 and older to learn together about the opera's story, music, production design and characters. Children should be

accompanied by at least one parent or guardian. Tickets are \$10. For tickets and more information, visit sfopera.com/education or call (415) 864-3330.

TICKETS AND INFORMATION

Tickets for *It's a Wonderful Life* are priced from \$26 to \$398. A \$2 facility fee is included in all Balcony sections. All other sections include a \$3 per ticket facility fee. For tickets, visit sfopera.com, call (415) 864-3330 or visit the San Francisco Opera Box Office at 301 Van Ness Avenue, San Francisco. Box Office hours: Monday 10 a.m.–5 p.m.; Tuesday through Saturday 10 a.m.–6 p.m. Standing Room tickets go on sale at 10 a.m. on the morning of each performance. Standing room tickets are \$10 each, cash only, and limited to two tickets per person. Casting, schedules and ticket prices are subject to change.

Each presentation of *It's a Wonderful Life* at the War Memorial Opera House features a Pre-Opera Talk with San Francisco Opera Dramaturg Dr. Clifford “Kip” Cranna interviewing Jake Heggie and Gene Scheer. Beginning 55 minutes prior to curtain, Pre-Opera Talks are open to tickets holders for the corresponding performance.

OperaVision screens, suspended from the ceiling of the balcony section at select performances, provide close-up and mid-range ensemble shots in high-definition video; English subtitles appear at the bottom of each screen. OperaVision is made possible by the Koret-Taube Media Suite.

The War Memorial Opera House is located at 301 Van Ness Avenue. Patrons are encouraged to use public transportation to attend San Francisco Opera performances. San Francisco Opera is pleased to offer [complimentary shuttle service](#) to and from Civic Center BART station for all Fall 2018 mainstage performances. Shuttle service is offered 90 minutes before and 45 minutes following every performance. The War Memorial Opera House is within walking distance of the Civic Center BART Station and near numerous bus lines, including 5, 21, 47, 49 and the F Market Street. For further public transportation information, visit bart.gov and sfmta.com.

Van Ness Construction: Due to construction for the SFMTA Van Ness Improvement Project, vehicles are unable to pick-up and drop-off at 301 Van Ness Avenue, and bus lines 47, 49 and 90 may experience travel delays. Please use the white loading zone at 450 Franklin Street (behind the Opera House) for rideshare pick-up and drop-off. We suggest planning extra time.

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IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE CASTING AND CALENDAR

*San Francisco Opera Debut ♪Role Debut †Current Adler Fellow •OperaVision Performance
All performances take place at the War Memorial Opera House.

IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE by Jake Heggie and Gene Scheer
WEST COAST PREMIERE

November 17 (7:30 p.m.), **20** (7:30 p.m.), **24*** (2 p.m.), **25*** (2 p.m.), **29*** (7:30 p.m.);
December 1* (7:30 p.m.), **4** (7:30 p.m.), **7** (7:30 p.m.), **9** (2 p.m.), **2018**

Co-commission and co-production of San Francisco Opera, Houston Grand Opera and the Indiana University Jacobs School of Music

Music by Jake Heggie

Libretto by Gene Scheer

Based in part on the film *It's A Wonderful Life*™ by permission of Paramount Licensing, Inc., and on *The Greatest Gift*, a story by Philip Van Doren Stern.

By arrangement with Bent Pen Music, Inc.

Sung in English with English supertitles

Approximate running time: 2 hours, 30 minutes including one intermission

First performance:

Houston; December 2, 2016

Cast:

George Bailey

Clara

Mary Hatch

Uncle Billy Bailey

Mr. Potter

Harry Bailey

Angels First Class

Mother Bailey

Ernie

Helen Bailey

Ed

Mr. Martini

Randall

Mrs. Thompson

A Woman

A Man

Suitor

Mr. Rufino

Mr. Delgado

Mrs. Delgado

Mrs. O'Malley

Young George

Young Harry, Tommy

William Burden

Golda Schultz*♪ / Kearstin Piper Brown*♪ (12/9)

Andriana Chuchman*♪

Keith Jameson*♪

Rod Gilfry

Joshua Hopkins*

Sarah Cambidge†♪, Ashley Dixon*†♪,

Amitai Pati†♪, Christian Pursell†♪

Catherine Cook♪

William O'Neill♪

Carole Schaffer♪

Anders Fröhlich♪

Chester Pidduck♪

Colby Roberts♪

Buffy Baggott♪

Claire Kelm♪

Jere Torkelsen♪

Andrew Truett♪

Phillip Pickens♪

Michael Belle♪

Erin Neff♪

Jesslyn Thomas♪

Benjamin Drever*♪

Pablo Gracia*

Young Sam
Young Mary, Janie
Zuzu

Joshua Partlow*
Violet Pasmooij*
Cadence Goblirsch*

Creative Team:

Conductor
Director
Set Designer
Costume Designer
Lighting Designer
Projection Designer
Choreographer
Chorus Director

Patrick Summers
Leonard Foglia
Robert Brill
David C. Woolard
Brian Nason
Elaine J. McCarthy
Keturah Stickann
Ian Robertson

San Francisco Opera Orchestra, San Francisco Opera Chorus and San Francisco Opera Dance Corps

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Wells Fargo is the Season Sponsor of San Francisco Opera.

It's a Wonderful Life is made possible, in part, by: John A. and Cynthia Fry Gunn; Kaiser Permanente; The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation; San Francisco Opera Guild; Jan Shrem and Maria Manetti Shrem, through the Emerging Stars Fund; and an award from the National Endowment for the Arts.

OperaVision, high-definition projection screens featured in the upper balcony level, is made possible by the Koret/Taube Media Suite.

Yamaha is the official piano of San Francisco Opera. Pianos provided by Piedmont Piano Company.



2018–19 Season Sponsor



High-resolution, downloadable production photographs of *It's a Wonderful Life* and artists headshots are available at sfopera.com/press. For cast biographies, visit sfopera.com.

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